

HOW TO TIDY, ORGANISE & DECLUTTER WITH CHILDREN

THIS GUIDE IS FOR YOU IF

- You feel overwhelmed or exhausted with the influx of "kids stuff" into your home
- You feel stressed or frustrated by clutter or your attempts to reduce it
- You would like some tips on how to teach your children tidying and organising skills
- You're unsure where to begin because your tidying efforts are undone by your children!

WHAT I'LL COVER

- Distinguishing between daily tidying, decluttering and organising
- The benefits of involving our children in all 3 elements
- When is right time to launch a tidying campaign at home?
- From what age can we involve our children?
- How to adapt the KonMari Method® for children of various ages
- 21 practical tips to get you started
- Focusing on progress and joy, never perfection
- Focusing on what we can control, letting go of what we cannot
- Go-to storage solutions



MEET TANYA



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Hi and welcome! I help my clients transform their homes using the KonMari Method® popularised by Marie Kondo's books and Netflix shows. Decluttering, organising and creating systems at home are powerful tools in making space for more joy, both physically and mentally.

Having racked up 500+ hours with my 1-to-1 clients, most of whom are parents, and as a mum of two, I know the practical challenges of maintaining an organised home. When I say organised, I don't mean Instagram or Pinterest-worthy. I'm talking about an inviting sanctuary for parents and children, a home that is the antidote to our stress rather than a cause of it.

First things first. What are the earliest memories you have of tidying with your child? For some of us, it's a "tidy up" song where our kid partakes more enthusiastically in nursery or school than with us!

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DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN 3 ASPECTS OF TIDYING

The more families I work with, the more I find myself clarifying that these 3 aspects are quite different:



To confuse things further, none of these are the same as cleaning. When we ask a child to tidy up their room, what do we mean? Perhaps a bit of daily tidying (make the bed, put things away) and a bit of cleaning (wipe the paint spills off their desk)? Often we focus mostly on our kids putting items away. But do their things have designated places? And who decided where things should go?

INVOLVING OUR CHILDREN IN DAILY TIDYING, DECLUTTERING AND ORGANISING FOSTERS LIFELONG SKILLS AND VALUES

- Deciding when to let go and doing so with gratitude
- Confidence and conviction in their own decisions
- Respecting space and property, both their own and other's
- Fostering their independence
- Increasing their ability to focus
- Becoming aware of their pace of consumption
- Learning about charity in a tangible way
- Appreciating experiences over material things
- Categorising in ways that are logical to them



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WHEN IS THE RIGHT TIME TO LAUNCH A TIDYING CAMPAIGN AT HOME?

If tidying is an ongoing struggle, you may benefit from a fresh start. First systematically declutter, then organise. Imagine every item in your home is one you love or need. Once the excess is gone, it will be simpler to find logical homes for your things and put organisational systems in place. This requires effort, but the benefits include saving time and energy daily and feeling more positive about your space.

I recommend guiding your children after you have put your own things in order. The toys may frustrate you. But if your own wardrobe, bookshelves or papers are a mess, they make for a better starting point. You will feel calmer and happier tackling joint family clutter (which let's face it, you don't have as much control over!) once you have an organised haven amidst the chaos. Watching you transform your own space may well pique your children's curiosity. More importantly, practicing your own tidying skills will give you confidence in guiding others. I have plenty of resources on how to begin your tidying journey but here I focus on tidying with children.

FROM WHAT AGE CAN CHILDREN MAKE THEIR OWN DECISIONS?

Whilst this depends on each child's abilities, patience and attention span, children as young of three can be guided through making decisions about which items to keep and which to discard. They often are clear on what brings them joy! As you will see from my practical tips below, you can involve even young children in many ways.

REMINDER: YOU CAN ONLY CONTROL WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL

There is no generic "right" amount of toys and children's clothes to own. Part of the magic is discovering the volume and pace of turnaround of material stuff that feels joyful and manageable for your household. With the right systems in place, you will feel mentally and practically on top of things.

I always say the volume of stuff in a home says nothing about the volume of love in a home. We each have the right to choose how much comes and stays. It may feel you have no control, but you do! That said, letting go of the things you cannot control is at the heart of my methods. If my 4 year old doesn't put her books back in the rainbow order I thought was cute, that's a "me" thing, not a "her" thing. The sooner we work together, the happier we are.

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PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE: 21 TIPS

1) CHILDREN IMITATE BEFORE THEY LISTEN

We are their role models. When our children see us put things back where they belong or see us letting items go with gratitude, it normalises it for them. When they see everyone in the household doing something (e.g. taking dishes to dishwasher) that becomes the bar. Tidying and decluttering are not jobs to power through when the kids are out.

2) INTRODUCE THE “WHY” OF TIDYING AS SOON AS THEY UNDERSTAND

You can reinforce concepts such as: Our homes are for us to live in. We need space to play. When we have too many things that overflow, we can't find what we need easily. Activities and experiences are most important. Other children can use the things we no longer love or use. Younger children may appreciate story books on these themes. You might already have these and can link the concepts to real life situations. The Smartest Giant in Town - Julia Donaldson (being charitable), A Squash and a Squeeze - Julia Donaldson (appreciating space in the home), Fox's Socks pop-up book - Julia Donaldson (struggling to find what you want in a mess) and Kikki and Jax - Marie Kondo (about two friends, each with a different approach to tidying.)

3) BEFORE STARTING, CHECK THAT YOU AND YOUR CHILDREN KNOW WHERE THEIR STUFF IS

This may sound obvious but their items may be scattered across many locations. You might want to take a little tour with them. An example from my home: Most toys in living room large chest and base of TV stand, arts and crafts in living room, play kitchen/kitchen toys/playdoh in kitchen, some toys in bedroom, clothes in bedroom cupboards, fancy dress box in bedroom, books on hallway shelves, bath toys and toiletries in bathroom, coats/shoes/backpacks in hallway, outgrown clothes stored under spare bed, scooters, bikes, helmets in hall cupboard. This list illustrates just how much stuff we have found space for in four years!

4) START ON EASIER CATEGORIES BEFORE MOVING TO HARDER ONES

Starting with sentimental items is challenging for adults and children alike. I usually suggest following Marie Kondo's category order for children: 1. Clothes, 2. Books, 3. Papers (artwork and schoolwork), 4. Komono (mainly toys), 5. Sentimental items (cuddly toys, mementos.)

5) KEEP TASKS MANAGEABLE FOR THEM

For example, rather than getting out all the toys, you might get out all their vehicle toys or all their board games for small chunks of decluttering.

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6) ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILDREN TO “JOY-CHECK” THEIR THINGS

Gather all of the chosen category in one place. You can ask them to pick out their three favourite items. Ask them why those make them happy. Compare items to their favourites to help them decide whether to keep them. Depending on the age of the child, you may do a first round cull of items they will not miss before including them. Allow your children some freedom to choose without triple checking "are you sure..?" If you want them to keep a certain outfit or toy that they are letting go of, then it becomes your sentimental possession, not theirs! If this is the first time you thoroughly joy-check you may discover forgotten items. Remember, it becomes easier each time. I aim to joy-check my children's toys with them twice a year, especially before new things arrive at Christmas and birthdays. Sometimes, my 4-year-old says goodbye to a lot, other times zilch!

7) GUIDE THEM USING LANGUAGE THEY UNDERSTAND

Help them decide what sparks joy: "Does this item make you happy?" "Why does it make you happy?" "Do you still use this / wear this?" "How do you feel when you use this / wear this?" "Which is your favourite jumper/dress/train set?" "Can you pick the 3 you like best?" "Could another child enjoy using this now?"

8) “WAKE UP” THEIR BOOKS

Marie Kondo's method for tidying books is to take them all off the shelves and then give the piles a tap to wake them up from their slumber! Your children might enjoy this.

9) ENCOURAGE THEM TO SAY GOODBYE WITH GRATITUDE

Gratitude can make it easier and more positive to let go. You can encourage them to say "bye bye and thank you." It's also an opportunity to share how they feel. Did they learn something from that book? Did they once enjoy the warmth of the coat they've outgrown? Do they remember when they made that art? Who gave them that toy?

10) TEACH THEM TO FOLD AND PUT AWAY THEIR CLOTHES

Start small with socks, it's the easiest technique for little ones to master. You can progress to t-shirts, trousers and so on. They may enjoy file-folding and putting clothes directly into their drawers or in boxes in drawers or on shelves. Some nice shoeboxes or £6 IKEA skubb 6-sets work a treat.

11) LET THEM HELP CREATE AN ORGANISED SYSTEM

The more they feel they have created the system, the more likely they are to respect it. To use my 4-year-old as an example, she helped categorise the toys in her IKEA Trofast drawers: "dolls and babies", "Peppa and little friends" and so on and helps me print labels. Several of my clients' children have enjoyed playing with the label maker!

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12) RELINQUISH CONTROL

I have already talked about what we can and can't control. Sometimes, even when we can control it, it's not worth our effort. We can't expect our children to fold or tidy to our standard. If it works for them in their space, can we set a lower bar? This brings me nicely to tip 13.

13) CREATE ZONES WITH BOUNDARIES

This is crucial as our children grow. After all, the amount of stuff out or "clutter" that bothers each member of the household is different. Set clear boundaries. For example, stuff that belongs in their room, goes back to their room. They can have more autonomy there without stressing you out. In the family living space, a toy cupboard or box that can be closed when kids are not there is a great idea. If possible, avoid an exposed toy zone in the line of sight of your TV or your favourite armchair. I think about this when I enter a client's living space: how easily can the grown-ups unwind in the shared living space? Stepping on lego is not a relaxing experience. Rearranging the furniture can often drastically reduce parental "mess stress".

14) MOTIVATE CHILDREN TO TAKE PART IN DAILY RESETS

That is, putting items back where they belong. Depending on the age of your children, there is room for rewards, praise, quick-fire timers, competitions together. Do think about empowering language that fosters an ownership mentality. e.g. "I'm really proud of you for looking after your stuff" rather than simply "Thank you for helping me." There is no magic wand (I wish!) This is habit-building and some days despite re-iterating these concepts, modelling and guiding, our kids won't play ball. That's not a failure. Certain days I can't be bothered to put my clothes away and I leave dirty dishes in the sink. But I'll do it the next day! Think about when to cut yourself and your children some slack.

15) CREATE A MEMORY BOX OR FILE FOR EACH CHILD

When it comes to old birthday cards, keepsakes, artwork and schoolwork, I have a wealth of ideas on how to store them. Once you've chosen a representative selection that sparks joy, you can put them into a pretty cardboard box or file. Birthday cards from a particular year can be tied with a ribbon in the middle to bind a "card book." If you do not want to store much bulky artwork, you can photograph them and print an album. Depending on the age of your children, it might be an activity for the school holidays.

16) CONSIDER TOY ROTATION

If you have a lot of toys, keeping a selection accessible and periodically rotating works wonders. It helps my little ones focus on playing with what's available and feel excited about "new toys" when we rotate. I have an IGTV video on @organised.joy instagram explaining this in detail if you are curious.

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17) HAVE A PLAN WHEN KIDS' STUFF ENTERS YOUR HOME...

Set up "inboxes" and build on habits that avoid stuff piling up. These are not prescribed, but here are a few examples in my home to illustrate.

- New clothes: Cut off the tag, decide where in the wardrobe it lives, or does it go into a "to grow into" box? Can it replace something else?
- New toys: Decide where its new home is. Can it replace something else? Art and school work: Put into into a designated inbox (unless it's a straight-to-bin-special, no judgement) which you go through periodically, to display, store or discard.
- Gifts: Set your boundaries and reiterate them. I have posted clutter-free gift guides and advice on how to deal with the gifts that don't spark joy on my instagram.
- Party bags: These have a knack of floating about in our kitchen. Use as many bits as possible right away, decide what to keep and categorise (put extra sweets you want with snacks in kitchen, the little toys with toys, colouring books with art supplies etc.)

18) ...AND HAVE AN EXIT PLAN!

Always keep a charity bag to hand. When you notice some kids' clothes or toys to donate, put it in the bag right away. If you make a charity drop, take your kids with you so they better understand the life cycle of their things. You can donate to general charity shops or children specific ones such as Fara Kids, The Toy Project and Little Village. It may be worth calling ahead to check your items are accepted. You can sell on Gumtree, Facebook marketplace, Ebay or other local parent groups. Or pass on quickly via the Olio phone app. Either way, set yourself a selling deadline and if you haven't done it, time to donate!

19) SHARE AGE-APPROPRIATE TIDYING RESOURCES

Examples include folding videos on YouTube, Marie Kondo's "The life changing Manga of tidying up" comic book or TV shows such as Sparking Joy with Marie Kondo, The Home Edit (Netflix) or Sort Your Life Out (BBC iplayer.) I wrote a short blog on where to start for adults which will be relevant for teens too. Reading suggestions for younger children can be found above in tip number 2.

20) SET UP YOUR ENTRANCE HALL FOR YOUR KIDS

I recommend a specific hook and/or box for each child to put their current-use coat, shoes and bag when they enter. My hallway is too narrow to fit floor boxes, so I got some big initial hooks from Etsy for each of my girls. Nurseries and schools tend to get children into the habit of putting their things on their own hook so why not use that to your advantage? Less picking up after our kids is on many a wish list.

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21) BE KIND TO YOURSELF WHEN IT COMES TO LETTING GO

It can be highly emotional for us parents when we finally let go of baby and children items. By this point, the items no longer belong to our children. They are our belongings packed away for potential future use. They may become our sentimental items. My top piece of advice is to be discerning at the get go, keeping your favourites rather every outgrown item. Be decisive at the point of storage. If you do have another baby, they will probably still receive some gifts. If you are saving things for friends or relatives, they too will get other gifts and buy new. Choose things that are special or particularly useful and donate the excess. If storage is limited, can you sell bulky items like the buggy to free up space, and re-buy second-hand in the future? Label any boxes by age so when you do wish to access the items, you can find what you need. If this stuff represents tough decisions or raw emotions, don't rush yourself and consider asking for practical and emotional support.

GO-TO STORAGE SOLUTIONS

- I always suggest first declutter, second measure your space and only then decide if you need to buy. Sometimes we own various baskets and boxes that will do the job perfectly well... and we don't want additional clutter. Here are a few common go-tos that can help you with your search.
- Clothes: Slimline velvet clothes hangers on Amazon. To help contain folded clothes the IKEA Skubb range is my favourite: larger zip-up boxes for under the bed or on top shelf of cupboard for "too large", "too small" or "out of season" wear, the 6-set of IKEA Skubbs (costing £6) work for folded clothes or accessories either on shelves or inside drawers as dividers, quality shoeboxes or nice gift boxes can be used as drawer dividers too! Clear plastic boxes for easy-access under bed storage.
- Toys: I commonly see IKEA Trofast and Kallax ranges put to use. The advantage of Kallax or other cubby systems is that some shelves can be open for display or books and others can have cube baskets turning them into a functional drawer. The IKEA Eket range is less specifically marketed for kids but a fantastic cubby system that looks a bit more stylish in a shared living space. All manner of boxes, bins or baskets in a cupboard, under beds will work... the key is to stick to your measurements and your budget.
- Paperwork: Paperchase, hobby craft, Amazon and Muji all have good in-trays, memory boxes and document boxes for school memorabilia.

If you found this introductory guide helpful, I'd love to hear from you on email or social media! For more support and practical help with organising and decluttering of all types please visit <https://www.organisedjoy.com> or connect with me @organised.joy on Instagram. If you are interested in working with me one-to-one, my services and pricing can be found on my website. Take care, Tanya x